

KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

STAFF NOTE

Review Item:

704 KAR 3:305, Minimum Requirements for High School Graduation

Applicable Statute(s) or Regulation(s):

KRS 156:160, 704 KAR 3:305, 703 KAR 5:020

History/Background:

Existing Policy. At the direction of the Kentucky Board of Education (KBE), the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) in partnership with the field, has clarified and refined the Core Content for Assessment and has developed a timeframe and implementation plan for the refocusing secondary schools' work. As a result of this work, the work of the P-16 Council and a thoughtful review of various national reports (e.g., American Diploma Project, National Governors Association) specific policy issues have arisen related to the adequacy of the current high school graduation requirements to prepare students for the workforce and postsecondary education.

The Kentucky Board of Education promulgated 704 KAR 3:305, which specifies the current minimum requirements for high school graduation. The regulation specifies the fifteen required credits and seven electives for graduation as well as the requirement that each student complete an individual graduation plan (IGP) with an emphasis on career development. The regulation includes the provision that "a local board of education may substitute an integrated, applied, interdisciplinary or higher level course for a required course if the alternative course provides rigorous content and addresses the same applicable components of 703 KAR 4:060 (Academic Expectations). If a substitution is made, a rationale and course description shall be filed with the Department of Education."

Appendix A shows a comparison of the current high school graduation requirements to the recommended high school graduation requirements. This chart also contains a rationale for the recommended changes. Kentucky Department of Education staff recommends moving forward with the proposed graduation requirements as specified in the revisions to 704 KAR 3:305.

Appendix B provides the current graduation requirements for Kentucky school districts that show many districts have set requirements beyond the minimum. Many districts require additional credits, courses or course-taking patterns.

Options for Consideration:

Mathematics

The regulation as drafted requires four credits of mathematics (Algebra I, Geometry and Algebra II and a fourth credit tied to the IGP), and mathematics every year. As an alternative, the requirement could be three required credits (Algebra I, Geometry and Algebra II) and mathematics every year. In this case, the fourth mathematics course tied to the IGP would be required only when the student had completed the three required credits and had no mathematics scheduled during the senior year.

- Does the Board prefer to require four credits and mathematics every year or three credits and mathematics every year?

Opt Out Clause

According to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), eighteen states now offer college-preparatory and advanced diplomas that align more closely with college admission requirements. AASCU notes that while the college preparatory curriculum is the “default” curriculum, students in these states are allowed to opt out with parental permission. Achieve states that only Arkansas, Indiana, and Texas set an expectation that all students will participate in a rigorous college and work preparatory curriculum, noting that every student is “opted in” but that each state allows students with informed parental permission to “opt out.” In many states, the reluctance of some educators and parents to require all students to take Algebra II has driven the decision to introduce opt out provisions.

Examples of how a student could opt out of a high school graduation requirement might be: (1) through documented informed consent of the parent and (2) restricted to students with an Individual Education Program (IEP), based on the recommendation of an Admissions and Release Committee.

- Does the Board prefer to include an opt out provision as part of the minimum high school graduation requirements?
- If so, does the Board want those students who opt out to receive a different diploma?

IGP Accountability

Seven years after the adoption of the Individual Graduation Plan expectation by the Kentucky Board of Education, it is clear that many schools have not fully implemented the system as it was envisioned. Too many students do not have clear career goals and postsecondary education plans. Many students are graduating from high school unprepared to enter postsecondary education or the workforce. Also, many students are not making the connection between their work in school and their preparation for a career and adult life after high school graduation. As we move forward with implementation of the web-enabled Individual Graduation Plan, it will be critical that all middle and high schools meet the expectation of all students having a fully developed Individual Graduation Plan that is utilized

on an on-going basis to ensure students graduate from high school prepared for postsecondary education and the workforce.

In order to address the issue, a method of assessment and accountability is needed that measures both process and outcome criteria to determine a school's effectiveness in implementing Individual Graduation Plans to prepare all students for successful transition into postsecondary education and the workforce. This assessment would include measures of the schools' process for providing students individualized guidance and advising, while monitoring their achievement to ensure that all students make successful transition from middle school to high school, and high school to postsecondary education or the workforce.

It is proposed that scoring criteria be developed, based on levels of performance similar to what we now have in the scholastic audit/review process. A sample of the proposed performance indicators is included in Appendix C. A number of schools are already implementing these components, which can be used as benchmarks in developing the scoring criteria. The levels of school performance would be determined by a self-assessment, utilizing staff within the school district. In order to ensure accurate scoring, randomly selected schools would be audited during each accountability period. The results of the assessment would be included in a school's accountability index at the middle school and high school levels. If the Kentucky Board of Education agrees to move forward with including the Individual Graduation Plan process in the school accountability index for middle and high schools, adjustments in the accountability index formula will need to be considered.

- Does the Board want to make the IGP implementation process and/or results from implementation a part of the Accountability formula?

Policy Issues:

1. KDE staff recommends moving forward with the proposed graduation requirements for all students beginning with the graduating class of 2010. Does the KBE concur?
2. What additional considerations should staff investigate?

Impact on Getting to Proficiency:

Once *Kentucky's Program of Studies for Kentucky Schools* and the *Core Content for Assessment* are brought into alignment, the increased rigor required for high school graduation will encourage more high level learning experiences in Kentucky classrooms. These experiences will allow students to reach proficiency within the state assessment system but more importantly be successful in their postsecondary endeavors.

Groups Consulted and Brief Summary of Responses:

Principals Advisory Council - This proposal was shared with the Principals Advisory Council on September 7, 2005. They were in general agreement with the proposal. As Appendix B illustrates, many districts are already requiring additional requirements beyond the minimum requirements outlined in the current regulation. The principals indicated some concern about Algebra II. If a student needs more than one year to complete Algebra II, they were

concerned this would have a negative impact on their elective programs. The group also has a perceived need for additional mathematics staff to meet the increased requirements. They were concerned there might not be staff available to meet the increased demand. The principals supported the recommendation to allow students at the high school level to specialize in an art form. They also expressed a need for increased student competency in World Languages but no recommendation was made to make this a graduation requirement.

Local Superintendents Advisory Council - The Local Superintendents Advisory Council will forward its input to the KBE in a letter from that body following its September 27, 2005, meeting.

Instructional Support Network - These recommendations will also be shared with the Instructional Support Network. Their comments will be summarized and shared with KBE members at their December meeting.

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